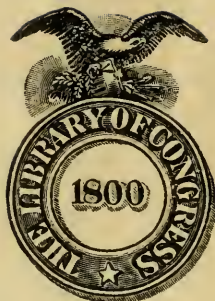


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VANITIES IN VERSE.

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No. ~~XXX~~

VANITIES IN VERSE.

Duchess. Take pen and ink, and write.
Are you ready?

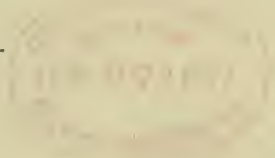
Antonio. Yes.

Duchess. What did I say?

Antonio. That I should write somewhat.

Duchess. Oh, I remember.

Francis Oden Hill



7541-e²²

PAUL LEMPERLY, CLEVELAND.

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TO THE DUCHESS.

*You bade me write, and in your hand
I place my bunch of posies—so!
And you will read and understand,—
Dear heart, sweet heart, you know, you know.*

*And why I bid my heart from view,
And why I whisper, whisper low,
And bend my face close, close to you,—
Dear heart, true heart, you know, you know.*

*With vanities my thought I drest
To trick and fool the passing show;
But you are wiser than the rest,—
Dear heart, dead heart, you know, you know.*

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A CONTRETEMPS.

Smith dealt the cards, and Brown, who had the age,
In a fine blending of bombast and sense
Doubled, as was his privilege, the pot.
Be not deceived, Francesco, by the term.—
Not the spun bowl of Japanese or Turk,
Urbino, Gubbio, or Henri Deux,
Majolica, faience, or such like gaud
That ornaments the table of the time,
And, by a sort of baked-in ugliness,
Sets all th' world agog ; but a plain Jack Pot.
You may have seen the game ?

Not so ? Then grant

Me leave to pause a moment in my tale,
And show by what precise and direct laws
The sport is governed.

Mark me, Francesco.

For form's sake we will place the table here,
Or there, or, for that matter, anywhere,

And ranged around its orb'd periphery
Some four, or five, or six, or even seven,
Each furnished with a heap of golden dross
Plucked from the bowels of rich Potosi :
Rings, trinkets, chains, and such,—bijouterie
Of antique workmanship and strange design,
Left them, perhaps, by some flush ancestor
Who flourished in the ante-clinquant days,
When weight was paramount.

A certain sum,
Determined by the age, or elder hand,
Is then by deft and cultivated touch
Slid by each player to a given place,
Which, being equi-distant from the rim,
We call the center ; in plain terms, the pot.
A pack of cards is used, such as we see
In book-shops and the Y. M. C. A. rooms.
Frog-back, or Tourist, or the Koh-i-noor,
It matters not : their faces are the same ;
They speak a language cosmopolitan.
These cards are shuffled, then distributed,
In strict conformity to prior right,
Beginning at the left, and circling round,
A unit at a time, till each has five.
I know not whose compact and forceful brain

Wrought out these brief but arbitrary rules ;
Enough that 't is the law.

One other point :

The privilege of dealing, like the cards,
Passes in strict priority of claim
Unto the left. The process is not hard,
But I have noticed, with observant eye,
That he who wears a thumb thick, spatulate,
With generous well of moisture on his tongue,
Deals with the largest unction.

To proceed :

The stakes being up, the cards distributed,
Each player, as his cunning may direct,
Discards, if so he will, (not must,) a card
Or two, or all, receiving in exchange
The self-same number from the dealer's stock,
By which he must abide. Such is the law.
This feature is the genius of the game,
Involving points most deep and intricate
Of drawing, filling, perchance standing pat,
Pairs, threes, and fours, fulls, flushes, and so forth,
Inviting tact and dark diplomacy
Beyond the ken of Magnus Albertus
Or any bygone Magus of the East.

But to the point in hand.

As said before,
Smith dealt the cards, and Brown, who had the age,
In a fine blending of bombast and sense,
Doubled, as was his privilege, the pot,
Compelling Jones, myself, and also Smith
To play the same, or formally resign.
Jones fell a victim to the stratagem,
And idly dropped his hand, thus limiting
And casting certain bounds about his loss.

You know my way, the vigor of my blood,
Which courses through my veins like liquid fire,
O'erleaping all the bars in reason's fence,
And landing me at one Titanic bound
Full at the climax of my joys or woes.
In brief, I saw the raise which Brown had made,
(I hate the name — a most plebeian sound,)
And forthwith raised the sum of fifty pounds.
(This to affright him, for my hand was *nil*.)
Smith in his turn, like Jones, let fall his hand,
Leaving the final play to Brown and me.
Brown saw my raise, and calmly asked for cards,
Receiving only two, which staggered me,
As I supposed he blustered on a pair.

My turn then came, and with contemptuous air
I flung my cards into the refuse pack,
And called for five.

I know not how it is,
Francesco. Fate, or some mixed element
Darkly enthroned within the soul's domain,
Protects the soaring one who does and dares.
So chanced it now, for in the new-dealt hand
There lay four queens and king!—invincible,
For I had thrown a straggling ace away.
You understand, Francesco, what I mean?
Not all the combined forces of the earth,
The planetary system, sea, or air
Could win against my hand. Not all the weight
Embowelled in the golden Jupiter
Would count a jot. My hand was leverage
That could unseat it from its starry throne
And jostle it to chaos.

Brown played first,
And with a look half sneer upon his face
Staked but five pounds, to keep me in the game.
I matched the play, then coolly raised the pot
One hundred pounds.

At the academy

Of surgery, in Paris, I once saw
A vivisection. 'T was most curious.
A score or so of quidnuncs closed around
A pinioned hare,—moveless save its mute eyes,
Which plead for peace,—while one grave optimist
With scalpel, forceps, and curved bistoury
Laid open nature's secrets—arteries,
Nerves, muscles, and at last the beating heart
So busy in its office. This strange scene
Recurred to me as with inquiring eye
I followed, raise on raise, the face of Brown,
Till, ready for the *coup*, I raised the pot
Five hundred pounds.

Francesco, you have seen

A certain scar on the right cheek of Brown,—
I gave it him, you know, two years ago,—
Right here. No? Never noticed it, perhaps.
It was not plainly seen when in repose;
But now it stood defined, a crescent curve,
Clear cut and silvery, like the new moon's edge.
“I call,” he said, and in a dreamy way
Stacked up his coin and notes.

He found it short
A hundred pounds. Then, hesitating long,
He placed his hand within his vesture here,
And forthwith drew a jeweled miniature —
Angelica's ! See — this ! She gave it him !
“Will this make up the hundred pounds ?” he said.
I nodded my assent.

You recollect
About our trouble some two years ago ?
'T is idle to repeat the time-worn tale.
I loved Angelica. Her picture there,
Crowning the golden splendor of the pot,
Carried me back to my most happy days,
My thought in captive chains. With gaze still fixed
Upon the miniature, I dreamed my dream —
An idle, foolish dream. Brown broke the spell,
(Not for the first time, please you understand,)
And with his hand outstretched, as if to guard
From touch profane the image of his love, —
“I called you, sir !” he said.

I faced my cards.

.

This is my story. You have heard the rest,
Francesco, as have I; but I saw it not.
Thoughts traveling backward to a love that 's lost,
Yet still loved, are not easily controlled.
When I awoke I saw the dainty tool,
Half toy, half weapon, thin, crisp, vibrative,
Embodiment of crystallized flame,
Quivering at his heart !

Dead ? Yes ; quite dead.

BALLADE OF THE DEAD.

Where are the beauties who have graced
The Court, the halls of dazzling light,—
The swan-like neck, the taper waist,
The symphonies in pink and white ?
Where are the charms that drew the fight
On Ilium's walls and turrets steep ?
Where are the goddesses to-night ?
Why did we plant the dead so deep ?

Where is the virtue, prim, strait-laced,
That held the temple for the right :
The quick alarm, the danger faced,
The pride, the scorn, the added height ?
Where are the maids whose loyal plight
Withstood the wrack of donjon keep ?
Where has Diana taken flight ?
Why did we plant the dead so deep ?

Where are the warriors, steel encased,
Who ruled when Launcelot was knight ?—

The cause espoused, the reckless haste,
The high disdain, the bold despite ?
Where Cœur-de-Lion, man of might,
And he of Bayard ? Ah, they sleep
Beneath the lists, beyond the sight.
Why did we plant the dead so deep ?

L'ENVOI.

Man, do you read my thoughts aright ?
We plow and sow, that we may reap ;
What of the crop the grave-worms blight ? —
Why did we plant the dead so deep ?

BALLADE OF ASPERO.

I cannot hold to creeds, for I am one
Unused to bow to fashion's vain decree.
My thought, my act, my soul, are mine alone,
And I, of living men, possess the key.
Untutored is my neck, uncrooked my knee,
To those set rules that sway men thus and so ;
I shall be ever I, unfettered, free,—
I am the thing was made for Aspero!

Truth is forever truth. And yet I own
My truth to some were rank apostasy;
Yet would I be no better than a stone
Did not my soul translate my truth for me.
And though the wise and I may not agree,
Each one, mayhap, his store of truth shall know:
One is for war, and one for minstrelsy,—
I am the thing was made for Aspero!

And when for me familiar day is done,
And I float out upon that unknown sea,

Though swept by storms, now this way, that way,
 blown,
 Wasted and worn by dire adversity,
 I would have strength to totter unto Thee,
And at Thy sacred feet that remnant throw,
 With voice to cry, “O Master, I am he!
I am the thing was made for Aspero!”

L'ENVOI.

Ah, grant me this, that I may ever be
 True to myself and Thee through ebb and flow.
Thou art the Author and the Deity,—
 I am the thing was made for Aspero!

THROUGH MY BINOCULAR.

'T was but a drop of water from a vase
Where roses died, and yet I saw a sight —
Or did I dream? — that filled my soul with awe.
Methought I was the one all-seeing eye,
Perched leagues above a seething surging mass
Of living things; as far as eye could reach
A myriad throng, some here, some there, in groups,
And colonies, and kingdoms of their own.
And one, that seemed an enemy to all,
A monster, fierce, vindictive, agile, strong,
Dashed through the waters with amazing speed,
Making quick havoc in each separate group,
And all bethought to hide when it came nigh.
But hush! a sudden terror strikes them all!
The sea, so vast before, seems shrunk now,
And each, as if some great calamity
Hung over him, moves quickly to and fro.
The waters thicken still! In endless ooze
The countless millions creep, and strive to pass.
They stop! they pant! and in an instant more
The vast sea-bed 's a grave, and all is still!

IN THE CATHEDRAL.

If you were that church-window angel,
And I the grave saint overhead,
I would steal to your place in the casement
At twelve, when the world was abed ;
I would breathe in your ear a warm whisper,
And quicken your framework of lead.

I would hand you adown oh so gently,
As due one so dainty and rare ;
Your robe, now constrained in your window,
Would float on the nebulous air.
That rose by the pyx on the altar
I would twine in your luminous hair.

I would kiss you, and ask you to banish
That far-away look from your eyne ;
Your hand, lightly poised, (as if listening,)
Would tremblingly nestle in mine.
(I wonder what word could have sculptured
Those lips in such perfect design !)

Like a knight and his ladye a-wedding,
Down the shadowy aisle we would pass ;
Those rugged old heads of the martyrs
Would bow in their fretwork of glass ;
Those cherubs aloft would chant anthems ;—
Saint Peter himself would say mass.

We would tread in the sweep of the chancel
Some stately old measure of yore —
Grave steps of retreat and advancing
That our ancestors used to adore.
I would bow you so low that my nimbus
Would strike like a chime on the floor.

Our natures of angel and mortal
Would meet on a boundary line :
In me what was purest and highest
With your stainless soul would combine.
I would lead in affairs sacerdotal,
You in matters more strictly divine.

I would tell you the story of Aglæ,
Who grieves from her panel below,—
Of Aglæ and Boniface, lovers
Who lived, sinned, and died long ago.

See! he waits farther down by the pillar.
('T is a sin to have parted them so.)

Hand in hand, with a sinuose motion
We would glide through our ancient demesne.
I would tell you, I think, that I loved you,
And call you (might I ?) *Josephine* ;
We would speak soft and low, so the echoes
Should not hear us and gossip between.

And at last, when the face of the morning
Grew gray, like a face newly dead,
I would place you again in your window,
Tuck you up in your bedclothes of lead ;
You would still be the church-window angel,
I the grave patron saint overhead.

SUB ROSA.

Dearest, did you ever think
How the fancy of the poet
Quite outstrips the printer's ink
Commonly supposed to show it?
Now that red rose in your hair
Starts a troop of thoughts in motion
Fanciful as summer air,
Restless as the pulsing ocean.
Listen, dear, and try to find
What is hidden in my mind.

All the roses, dear, were white
When the world had its beginning,
And their present shades well might
Illustrate the grades of sinning —
Nature's hall-mark, I might say,
Which the loving One in Heaven
Uses in some secret way
To record a fault forgiven.
But the red rose, lord of all,
Marks the first, or primal, fall.

'T is a story sweet and sad
Of a maiden and her lover ;
Both were poor, and neither had
Clothes of proper cut or cover.
What, Miss Nancy, won't you list ?
Are we not progressing finely ?
Hidden thoughts, you see, exist ; —
Mine or yours ? You blush divinely.
If you try to make me miss
I shall stop you with a kiss !

'T is a tale allied to shame ;
But it really does not matter
Which of them was most to blame.
People here dispute and chatter.
'T was, perhaps, the fault of spring,
With its balmy breezes blowing, —
Time young bantams try their wing,
And experiment in crowing ;
Time the pent-up heart unlocks
In its vernal equinox.

They were summering alone
Near — we 'll say — to the equator ;

(No ; she had no chaperone ;
 Those duennas came in later ;)
 And the story got about
 (Rumors, dear, of course there *would* be)
 That the two beyond a doubt
 Were no better than they should be.
 Strange how people with a candle
 Peep about in search of scandal.

Was it not enough, *ma chere*,
 That they loved, and had their troubles ?
 That — What ? Stop ! and prick the air
 Out of all my pretty bubbles ?
 Very well. But let me add,
 For the sake of erring woman,
 That she was n't *very* bad, —
 Just pathetically human ;
 And (what everybody knows)
 'T was *her* kisses stained the rose.

There ! was I the least unfair ?
 Did I make the first allusion ?
 Fie ! the red rose in your hair
 Winks and laughs at your confusion.

But my purpose was to show
 (Not revive this old indictment)
How the hidden currents grow
 Under pressure of excitement.
Moral? Ah, you have me there.
Ask the red rose in your hair.

“TO MY MISTRESS’S EYEBROWS.”

Dark pencilings, that fringe the dome of thought,
And lambrequin the windows of the soul,
Thy autocratic will was never brought
Beneath the yoke of muscular control.
My lady cannot sway thee, as she may
Her dozen other agents who conceal
Her secret moods by some base underplay,
Who tempt me, fool me, break me on a wheel.

Fine capillary tubes, I know thy power.
Thou art for me my compass and my chart.
When thy dark canopies begin to lower,
I soothe, with oily speech, my lady’s heart,
And calm its troubled depths, lest I go down
Beneath the deep Charybdis of thy frown.

LOVE CROWNS ALL.

The world seems very small at close of day,
When I, released a moment from the chain
That binds me to my task-work, soul and brain,
Slip from my prison-house, and steal away
To where she waits. There I the monarch play,
Forgetful of the world and its disdain,
And in her presence half believe I gain
Those hero-heights where life is mastery.

For Love crowns all ; and living is at best
A dreamless death without Love's perfect grace.
What matter domes, and palaces, and all
Those heaps of future ruins east or west,
When she beside me with her radiant face
Makes all the world seem very very small ?

WHEN JERMYN LIVED.

When Jermyrn lived, the record says,
The court was ruled by love and praise ;
Each little beau had his amour,
And some had three or even four,—
“The more, the merrier !” as the phrase.

And grim old dowagers in stays,
And maids-of-honor, caught the craze.
One’s wife was not so *very* sure
When Jermyrn lived.

But times have changed. Its present phase
Shines dimly through platonic haze ;
We deal in ethics, thought adore,
And delve in mines of mystic lore.
Not so in those brisk stirring days
When Jermyrn lived.

THE BOOK TO THE READER.

(TRIOLETS.)

Will you view me with scorn,
Pretty Madge, Maud, or Frances ?
Sly coquettes, (yet unborn,)
Will you view me with scorn,—
Let me lie all forlorn
Where the attic ghost prances ?
Will you view me with scorn,
Pretty Madge, Maud, or Frances ?

Might I not have been writ
By some uncle or other ?
Years ago (when a wit)
Might I not have been writ
By your dad—just a skit—
Ere he married your mother ?
Might I not have been writ
By some uncle or other ?

Better keep me near by ;
Some old party may claim me —
Just suppose it were *I* !
Better keep me near by ,
And try — only try —
Not to question or blame me.
Better keep me near by ;
Some old party may claim me.

“ ’T WAS JUST LIKE THIS ! ”

[RONDELET.]

’T was just like this : —

(Now don’t be cross ; what could I do ?) —

’T was just like this :

Could I refuse the proffered kiss —

My brother’s wife’s half-sister, too ?

I kissed her, *not* as I kiss you ;

’T was just like *this* !

“I TOLD YOU SO !”

[RONDELET.]

I told you so !

They 're skittish ; more than that, they *shy*.

I told you so !

Now trust to me :— *Confuse her* ; show

A shifting front ; avoid her eye.

You 'll win the trick if you but try.

I *told* you so !

THE WAIF.

[VILLANELLE.]

Gently, now ! gently ! (Where 's *my* lass to-night ?)

Tidy her up ; make her winsome and fair.

What do *you* know of the wrong or the right ?

Many I 've handled. What 's there to affright ?

Close her eyes tenderly. God ! how they stare !

Gently, now ! gently ! (Where 's *my* lass to-night ?)

They 're much as men make them,—not so bad, quite.

Smoothe out the masses of tangled hair.

What do *you* know of the wrong or the right ?

Give her a gown of the daintiest white,

And a ribbon or two, such as women wear.

Gently, now ! gently ! (Where 's *my* lass to-night ?)

Now bring a box,—five feet two,—(Lizzie's height !)

That small one, half lined, with the pillow, there !

What do *you* know of the wrong or the right ?

See ! she is smiling ! (Oh, nail her up tight !)

She 'll sleep none the worse for a small bit of care.
Gently, now ! gently ! (Where 's *my* lass to-night ?)
What do *you* know of the wrong or the right ?

ADDRESS TO THE COMET.

Thou burnished Thing,
Forever on the wing,
All hail !
If one swish of thy tail
Tremendous
Would send us
To some more enlightened spot,
No matter whether
The weather
Be hot
Or not,—
Where Justice rules,
Not knaves or fools,
Or their tools,—
Where Manhood has some claim
Upon the name,—
Where Virtue wins regard
In addition to being its own reward,—
Where Hope has wings,
And various other things

Of which there is a dearth
Upon the Earth,—

Bright Rover of the Sky,
I,
An inhabitant of said Earth,
Of native birth,
And representing the better class of society,
Say unto thee
That if
One swish . . Biff!! . .
Would bring this change about
Without
Materially interfering with your route
Or schedule card,
Don't coldly pass us by,
Don't stop to reason why;
Let thy vast rudder fly!—
Give us one,—
Hard!

I REST CONTENT.

I rest content, nor care a jot
For that dull phrase “the common lot.”
I do not ask or wish to rise
Beyond the reach of friendly eyes ;
Such airy flight attracts me not.

The even pace, the jogging trot,
Best suits my slow and sober thought ;
Though others pass with eager cries,
I rest content.

My ingle-nook, my book, my pot
Of Cavendish, my pillowed cot,—
These, Allah ! are the things I prize.
Keep them but mine, the worldly-wise
May smile, and say — no matter what ;
I rest content.

DESTIN.

In the quiet land
Of Was-To-Be
No terrors come
To frighten me.

Some live in the world
Of Now-Take-Care,
And many ghosts
Abounden there.—

'T is a fearsome place
Of hidden mines,
And accidents,
And warning signs ;

And the people there
Are chilled with fear,
And many die
Twelve times a year.

No ; my world is best,
At least for me,—
The quiet land
Of Was-To-Be.

THE WATERMARK.

Within this page a hidden workman stands.

I see his forge, his arm poised for the blow.

Hark to his stroke! What shapes he with his hands?

And what his purpose? Answer, ye who know!

So stands the poet, deftly hid away

Midst vain conceits, and idly plays his part.

Yet ages hence who knows but one shall say —

“I see him there! I hear his beating heart!”

JUVO.

Who first invented this word FRIEND,
And hung the jewel in my ear?
How soft its purring liquids blend
Into the dental at the end!
How fears depart, how griefs amend,
When this my talisman is near!
Who first invented this word FRIEND,
And hung the jewel in my ear?

L'ENVOI.

O Duchess, take my meaning, then ;

For words are vain elusive things.

Who reads the quavers of the wren ?

Who knows the song the redbird sings ?

Betwixt the lines, and roundabout,

And down the cunning grooves of white,

The hidden thought winds in and out ;—

And there the song you bade me write !



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